

Healthy Relationships: Examining Alliances within Population—Health—Environment Projects

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By Cheryl Margoluis



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ACRONYMS

CI	Conservation International
EHP	Environment Health Project
FP	Family Planning
IPOPCORM	Integrated Population and Coastal Resource Management
M/E	Monitoring and Evaluation
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
PHE	Population-health-environment
RH	Reproductive Health
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
WWF	World Wildlife Fund

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This paper presents results of a study on lessons from PHE (population-health-environment) alliances to implement population-environment projects. The study is part of World Wildlife Fund's Successful Communities from Ridge to Reef project, which aims to provide reproductive health and family planning services in key areas where population growth has serious impacts on natural resources, and find more sustainable solutions for local livelihoods. This project, funded by USAID's Office of Population and Reproductive Health, has a learning component that asks, among other questions: "What makes population and environment alliances work effectively?" This document reviews the results of the WWF study that aimed to answer this question.

Why and How to Study PHE Alliances

PHE alliances implementing field projects comprise organizations from different sectors – usually conservation, and health, family planning and/or development. It is important to examine and learn from these alliances since their effectiveness is key to whether a project succeeds. PHE projects tend to be more complex, potentially more political, and involve partners that may be unfamiliar with each other and each others' field of expertise. Family planning and reproductive health are issues that may carry a strong positive or negative stigma for individuals and communities; this creates unique dynamics among organizations in a partnership and their target communities. For these reasons it can be challenging to build sustainable alliances.

In this study, 13 projects in the developing world were selected in which two or more organizations have worked together to bring family planning and reproductive health services to communities for at least three years with an end goal of biodiversity conservation. Primary data were collected using a semi-structured questionnaire for key informants, and project documents were used for background and supporting documentation.

How Member Organizations Affect the PHE Alliance

The study examined the organizations within alliances as well as the alliances themselves. Several characteristics of individual organizations can affect how the PHE alliance functions. Organizations need to be *flexible* in order to adapt to changing field conditions – particularly in PHE projects as they often involve a new approach where the outcome is less certain. Organizations need to be able to *work within agreed time frames*. In PHE projects, partners from different sectors may have very different time frames and funding cycles, which can pose a challenge for collaboration. Organizations need to be *transparent*, particularly on issues such as progress and funding. They also need to be viewed as *credible* by other organizations and by the communities in which they work. Organizations should aim to partner with those that have *complementary skills and resources*, such as staff skills, equipment, materials and access to communities and donors. They should think about *funding opportunities* when they join or create a PHE alliance. *Staff characteristics* such as gender, race and age can also affect how the alliance functions. The *size and level of the partner organizations* can have various effects on the alliance – as can the type of organization. *Partnering with governments* can have advantages and disadvantages, particularly with respect to funding, credibility and flexibility, which may vary by project site.

Reasons to Form PHE Alliances

Most alliances in this study were formed in order to *increase technical capacity* on a project – organizations chose to partner with others that brought different skill sets, particularly in those projects that require both environmental and health expertise. Many organizations also chose to form an alliance to *augment their financial strength*. Working together allows organizations to combine grants and to raise funds together. This can be particularly helpful for smaller organizations, which can partner with larger, more financially stable organizations. *Sustainability* was also a major reason to work with others –working with local or national organizations that work more closely with the communities was thought to potentially increase the chances of project sustainability.

The Structure of PHE Alliances

In addition to characteristics of organizations in the alliance, the structure of the alliance can also affect its effectiveness. We were able to discern four different types of alliance models present in this sample, categorized by the number of organizations, the decision-making structure and division of labor in the alliance. We included only those organizations that are actively involved in the PHE project. Alliances were categorized as:

- *simple involvement* (where one organization both implements and is in charge of the decision making, but partners with other organizations as needed)
- *one decision maker and one implementer*
- *many decision makers and one implementer*
- *two (or more) decision makers and two (or more) implementers.*

Each model had different advantages and disadvantages, as evaluated in the study.

The Performance of PHE Alliances

Several factors appeared to be important to create a well-functioning alliance. Organizations need to work together to create a *common vision* for the alliance – not just for the individual organizations. Alliances should *budget for start-up meetings* for the alliance, to get organized and allow staff members to begin to develop relationships with each other. The alliance needs to consider whether it can afford to have *staff members based on site* – which offers considerable advantages but requires substantial resources. If staff members are not all on site, the alliance needs to create the infrastructure to ensure *sufficient communication* among staff. And after the alliance is created, organizations need to *pay attention to the personal dynamics among staff members* and facilitate the development of constructive personal relationships, as individual staff members were found to play an important role in the functioning of the alliance. This is done in part by creating *a structure for regular, frequent communication among staff members*.

A potential problem in alliances that involve organizations from different sectors is that each sector tends to have a different vocabulary, which can cause difficulties in communication. Some of these difficulties can be avoided by *creating opportunities for staff members to learn about all aspects of PHE projects* – for example, health workers need to understand the conservation component and vice versa. Staff members also need to be prepared to use the resources available to them – therefore the alliance needs to *make training appropriate for the local resources*. The alliance must also provide *sufficient support* for field offices, particularly on technical issues and filling in knowledge gaps on PHE issues.

PHE projects often face unique funding challenges due to their multi-disciplinary nature; therefore they must *look for multiple sources of funding* that can provide flexibility for project implementation and sustainability for project continuity. And part of this funding must be set aside to develop capacity to *carry out sufficient monitoring and evaluation for the project*.

This study brought together lessons from the literature with past and ongoing population-environment projects in order to understand how to create more effective alliances in the future. The information gleaned from the study will enable PHE practitioners to create more effective PHE alliances, and therefore more effective PHE projects.

1. Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to present the results of a recent study conducted on the lessons learned in creating PHE (population-health-environment) alliances to implement population-environment projects.

1.1 Background on Study

The goal of World Wildlife Fund's (WWF) Population, Health, Gender and Environment Program is to alleviate the threat and impact of population pressures and HIV/AIDS on biodiversity in priority ecoregions. In the current phase, the program focuses on reproductive health, migration, HIV/AIDS and girls' education.

One of the Program's projects, Successful Communities from Ridge to Reef, aims to provide reproductive health services in key areas where population growth has serious impacts on natural resources and find more sustainable solutions for local livelihoods, so as to reduce pressure on biodiversity. This project has two main components: field support to integrated population-health-environment projects in three countries (Madagascar, Kenya and the Philippines) and a learning component to evaluate the effectiveness of reproductive health approaches in conservation and build capacity. The project is funded by USAID's Office of Population and Reproductive Health.

The learning component aims to enhance conservation of biodiversity, reduce population growth and improve reproductive health by advancing learning on effective population-environment interventions and promoting their application. The associated knowledge, tools and increased capacity will enable conservation and health organizations, including WWF, to prioritize efforts and increase their effectiveness in this field. Much of the learning will aim to develop and strengthen field approaches.

The working hypothesis of the learning component is that integrating FP/RH (family planning/reproductive health) into conservation projects and programs improves conservation results in the short term through improved operational efficiencies and human health. This result can also be assumed in the long term through reductions in population growth, sounder natural resource consumption and sustained improved health of human communities, but this requires monitoring and evaluation over time for complete verification.

Specifically, the learning process aimed to answer several questions:

1) What is the added value of combining family planning/reproductive health and conservation/natural resources management, specifically for achieving conservation objectives?

- 2) What types of decision-making tools are most useful for conservation practitioners engaged in or interested in starting to carry out "population and environment" work?
- 3) How do we scale up integrated approaches to "population and environment" issues?
- 4) What makes "population and environment" alliances work effectively?

This paper reviews the results from a study that aimed to answer the last question.

2. Current Research on Alliances

2.1 Advantages of Alliances

Although there are several reasons that organizations choose to form alliances, in each case the perceived benefits must outweigh the costs to the organization. Some of the potential benefits are the ability to:

- *Increase scale of effort.* Bringing together organizations that have the same services or outlook can create the critical mass necessary to tackle a problem.
- *Combine complementary skills.* Bringing together organizations with different skills allows them to work on projects where they don't have all the expertise they need in house.
- *See the bigger picture.* Bringing together organizations with different outlooks makes it possible for them to take a more holistic view of the situation. They can bring together organizations and individuals with different ways of thinking.
- *Minimize overlapping activities.* Working with multi-sectoral nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and community groups creates the ability to leverage resources, minimize overlapping activities and create stronger programs.
- *Create a new synergy.* Collaboration often creates a synergy that allows the alliance to create something more valuable than the individual organizations can do alone – to be greater than the sum of the parts.
- *Build on existing programs and social capital.* Organizations can contribute to projects that are already established in the field.
- *Gain credibility.* Organizations can gain credibility if they are associated with other successful organizations.
- *Pool financial resources.* Organizations can increase their power and impact by pooling financial resources.
- *Access other financial resources.* Organizations can access different kinds of financial support.
- *Build capacity.* Organizations can gain new knowledge and technical skills by working with partners with different backgrounds.
- *Fill in service gaps.* Combining efforts with the government allows organizations to work in areas that the government has been unable to reach.
- *Continue project coverage.* Organizations can opt to work together to ensure that projects are continued, even if the organizations that initiated them are no longer involved.

(Compiled from Margoluis 1999, Christensen and Keck 2000, Lasker 2001, Biddle 2004, Gomes-Jauregui 2004, Conservation International-Philippines 2005)

There are also potential disadvantages in forming alliances. The majority of the disadvantages cited are related to the fact that forming an alliance requires increased resources, such as money and staff time. But alliances can also create management problems if the organizations have different structures, goals or time frames for the project.

2.2 Factors that Affect Alliances

There are a number of factors that can affect the success of an alliance. The characteristics of the individual partner organizations that may be factors are

- *Level of organization.* The level at which the organization operates – usually categorized as local, national, international
- *Organizational type.* The sector in which the organization works, such as development, conservation, health, academic or governmental
- *Organizational resources.* The resources available to the organization – including money, staff, equipment, etc.
- *Vision, goals and objectives.* The clarity of the vision and goals of the organization, and how they translate into objectives
- *Flexibility.* The ability of the organization to adapt to changing conditions
- *Governance.* The decision-making structure in the organization – from the field office to headquarters
- *Administrative capacity.* The capacity of the organization to manage grants, reporting procedures and administrative tasks
- *Type of leadership.* The strength and quality of leadership at each level
- *Staff characteristics, size and location.* The number of staff and their location, as well as characteristics such as gender, nationality, experience and language ability
- *Age, credibility and time at site.* The age of the organization, how it is viewed by other organizations and communities and how long it has worked at the project site

(Compiled from Margoluis 1999, Biddle 2004).

The above-mentioned characteristics are important at the alliance level as well as the organizational level. In addition, there are several characteristics of the alliance itself that can greatly affect its ability to succeed:

- *Number of organizations.* The number of organizations that participate in the alliance
- *Efficiency.* How efficiently the alliance functions
- *Structure.* The structure of how the organizations interact in the alliance
- *Power dynamic.* The differential in power that may exist among partner organizations
- *Communication.* The ability of the member organizations to communicate in a transparent manner (which includes language abilities)
- *Division of labor.* The clarity and appropriateness of the roles of each organization in the alliance

- *Time commitment of partners.* The amount of time that each organization can spend on the alliance and the project
- *Funding.* The funding of the alliance itself – for example for planning sessions (Compiled from Margoluis 1999, Christensen 2000, Margoluis 2000, Lasker 2001, Biddle 2004, Conservation International-Philippines 2005)

In addition, the external environment in which the alliance operates can affect how it functions. Factors such as the political climate, legal restrictions or environmental conditions are often outside the control of the alliance.

2.3 Why PHE Alliances are Unique

The lessons that we find throughout the literature are generally those from conservation or development projects. But it is important to learn lessons specific to PHE projects as well because some traits are unique to this type of project. PHE projects tend to be complex and involve multiple sectors. The partners are often unfamiliar with each other and sometimes uncomfortable with each others' fields of expertise. The politics that surround these projects tend to be complex as well. Family planning and reproductive health are issues that may carry a strong positive or negative stigma for individuals and communities; this creates unique dynamics among organizations in a partnership and their target communities. In addition, the funding for PHE is often influenced by politics and therefore can be more inconsistent and unpredictable than for other interventions. This means that it can be challenging to build sustainable alliances.

2.4 Current PHE Projects

Currently, there are PHE projects being implemented throughout the world from which we can learn about alliance-building. For example, in the Bonga forest in Ethiopia, the German Foundation for World Population teamed up with the regional government, FARM Africa, the GEO Foundation and the Jimma Bonga Catholic Secretariat to introduce reproductive health options, participatory forest management and agricultural technology to communities at two different sites that are faced with high population growth and declining forest resources.

In Tanzania, the Jane Goodall Institute works with the National Family Planning Program and District Health Office and Engender Health to implement the Tacare project, which originally began as a pilot to address poverty issues and sustainable livelihoods in villages around Lake Tanganyika. The project currently has five primary project areas: community development, forestry, agriculture, health and 'roots and shoots', an environmental and humanitarian education program for youth.

Some of the large U.S.-based conservation NGOs also have specific programs that focus on PHE. The Population Environment program of CI (Conservation International) aims to reduce pressure on biologically rich areas by providing communities with health services, such as family planning. CI has implemented projects in the Philippines, Cambodia, Madagascar, Mexico and Guatemala. Each country program works in partnerships that are based on existing relationships and complementary skills with CI staff.

World Wildlife Fund-Philippines is working with the Ministry of Health to create sustainable natural resources management in priority areas of the Sulu to Sulawesi Marine Ecoregion. WWF aims to improve the knowledge and access to family planning and reproductive health information and commodities while promoting sustainable fishing practices among fisherfolk families and policy makers. WWF also has PHE projects in Madagascar, Cameroon and Kenya.

In addition, several PHE projects are also conducting operations research, trying to determine *how* to most effectively incorporate population and environment into projects. In the Philippines, the IPOPCORM (Integrated Population and Coastal Resource Management) initiative was created “to explore and test hypotheses about cross-sectoral program synergies between reproductive health, biodiversity conservation and food security efforts” (Castro and D’Agnes n.d.:1). The project aims to conserve the biodiversity of coastal ecosystems while improving the quality of life of communities that depend on coastal resources. The project primarily works with three groups in coastal habitats: fisherfolk, youth and entrepreneurs. In order to implement its projects, IPOPCORM creates alliances with local government agencies and local organizations, most of which specialize in environmental issues.

Another project that has been integrating population and environment is the EHP (Environmental Health Project) in Madagascar. The EHP supports the projects that are implemented by the Voahary Salama Association, an NGO umbrella organization comprising 29 funding, technical support and implementing partners. One of the major objectives of this association is to determine if integrated population-environment activities achieve better results than single-sector population or environment initiatives.

3. Methodology

For this study, projects were selected in which two or more organizations have worked together to bring family planning and reproductive health services to communities for at least three years with an end goal of biodiversity conservation. In the end, 13 projects were included in the study. Primary data were collected using a semi-structured questionnaire to key informants. The interviews consisted of open-ended and multiple choice questions, designed to gather both quantitative and qualitative data. Nineteen interviews were conducted in all. The goal was to interview a senior staff member directly involved in the management of the project from each organization in each alliance. Supporting documents, such as project documents and monitoring and evaluation reports, were gathered where possible.

The projects were located in the following countries:

- Cambodia
- Cameroon
- Ethiopia
- Kenya (2 projects)

- Madagascar
- Philippines (4 projects)
- Mexico
- Tanzania
- Uganda

4. Results

4.1 Organizations

Type of organization. Several different types of organizations were involved in the alliances in the sample:

- Commercial
- Community-building
- Community Marine Conservation
- Development
- Environmental
- Family Planning
- Forestry
- Health
- Ministry of Health, Government
- Population
- Religious
- Research

Scale. The sample included organizations that operated at the international, national and local scales.

Number of organizations. Most PHE alliances in the sample had between two and four active members. One alliance operated as a contract alliance within a consortium (see below) with 29 member organizations.

4.2 PHE Alliances

4.2.1 Reasons to Form a PHE Alliance

There are a variety of factors that may influence an organization's decision to form a PHE alliance. We asked organizations to name the top three reasons they joined their current alliance (Table 1).

Most alliances in this sample were formed in order to increase technical capacity on a project by combining with organizations that bring different sets of expertise. This is an important factor in these types of projects that require both environmental and health expertise. Many organizations also chose to form an alliance to augment their financial strength. Working together allows organizations to combine grants as well as to raise funds together. This can

be particularly helpful for smaller organizations, which can partner with larger, more financially stable organizations.

Table 1. Top Three Reasons to Form a PHE Alliance

Number of times each factor was named in the top three reasons to form a PHE alliance.

14	Technical capacity – Bring different sets of expertise to program and/or project
9	Financial capacity – Both existing and potential capacity to combine existing funds, sub-grant relationships, etc.
7	Sustainability – Local organization/government agency that will continue and/or institutionalize work after project ends
7	Access to target audience – Have access to different constituencies
4	Geographic reach – Cover a greater geographic area
3	Legitimacy – Reputation of partner(s) lends legitimacy to the program/project
2	Other – Logistically well placed partner (1 alliance), preexisting institutional arrangements and project plans (1 alliance)
1	Political influence – Have political connections that are of benefit to the other organization/program/project

In this sample, sustainability also appeared to be an important reason to work with others. Several individuals thought that working with local or national organizations that work more closely with the community might increase the chances of project sustainability. Although many individuals believed that this was a key reason to form an alliance, many also thought that the issue was not given sufficient attention in terms of planning for the future.

4.2.2 Type of PHE Alliance

The survey differentiated between six types of alliances. In the end, we found that the alliances generally fell into four categories. It should be noted, however, that it can be difficult to determine how many organizations are actively involved in an alliance, as some provide support on an ‘as needed’ basis. In addition, in some projects, there is more than one alliance involved (hence there are more than 13 projects listed).

Table 2. Types of PHE Alliances

6	Formal Consortium – Similar to partnership, but includes three or more organizations with a formal, written agreement
4	Formal Partnership – Two organizations agree to work together to achieve a specific mutually beneficial goal or on a specific project and have a formal, written agreement
2	Informal Alliance – Two or more organizations agree to work together to achieve a particular mutually beneficial goal or on a specific project but lack a formal, written agreement
2	Contractual Agreement – One organization hires another to complete specific tasks

4.2.3 Roles of Organizations

Organizations can play different roles in the alliance (categories based on Margoluis 2000). In fact, some organizations play more than one role in the alliance. Again, these categories are somewhat fluid in that they can change as the alliance and project develop.

Table 3. Roles within the PHE Alliance

6	Primary implementing organization – Organization that is principally responsible for carrying out the project activities
6	Joint implementing organization – Organization that shares responsibility for implementation
6	Primary decision-making organization – Organization that serves as the lead organization and is ultimately responsible for programmatic decisions related to the project
4	Joint decision-making organization – Organization that shares decision making responsibility and accountability)
1	Simple involvement – Organization that does not play a key role, such as the primary implementer or decision maker

4.2.4 Decision Making

Almost all organizations thought that they made decisions for the project in a consensus fashion. One individual noted that the team members were much more efficient when they were informed. There were, however, differences among the organizations within several alliances on how they viewed the decision-making structure.

Table 4. Decision-making Structure within the PHE Alliance

14	Consensus decision: An entire group from all partner organizations considers a problem on the basis of reason and discussion
3	Minority decision: One person or a few people from each partner organization consider the matter and make a decision
1	Individual decision: One person makes the decisions for the project
0	Majority decision: More than half of those involved in a situation from each partner organization make a decision

4.3 Factors to Consider Before Joining a PHE Alliance

4.3.1 Characteristics of Potential Partners

Before joining or creating a PHE alliance, organizations need to think about the characteristics of potential alliance members and how these characteristics may affect the ability of the organizations to work together. The individuals that we interviewed noted that the specific needs of each organization will vary, but there are several *general* characteristics that are important to consider before forming or joining an alliance.

Flexibility. Organizations need to be flexible in order to adapt to changing field conditions. This is particularly true in PHE projects as they often involve a new approach where the outcome is less certain. In addition, these types of projects often bring together partners that may be unfamiliar with each other's expertise, so organizations must be flexible in how they work together.

Timeliness. Organizations need to be able to work within the agreed time frames. In PHE projects, different sectors, which may have very different time frames and funding cycles, need to work together. One individual noted that *before* creating an alliance, the organizations should develop procedures to follow if an organization does not fulfill its duties in the agreed time frames.

Transparency. Organizations need to be able to be transparent, particularly on issues such as progress and funding. Several individuals noted that both local NGOs and communities were weary of promises made by outside organizations. Being transparent helped maintain the necessary support and enthusiasm for the project.

Credibility. Organizations need to be viewed as credible by other organizations as well as by the communities in which they work. Several organizations mentioned credibility as an important factor in the success of their project as it affected how the community received the project. One organization that had already been working in an area noted that they could introduce family planning into their conservation project without much difficulty because they had already established themselves as legitimate workers in the community. Another organization noted that the relationship that its partner had established with the community was crucial to its ability to go in and implement the project in a timely manner. Although solid credibility can facilitate a project, poor credibility may hinder one. Lessons from one project stated that the project staff learned to partner with trustworthy organizations. The final lesson from this group was that "action speaks louder than words" and that if "one, both or all parties violate agreements, trust is compromised, and the sincerity of actors as natural resource managers is open to question" (Conservation International 2005a). It is important to remember that the communities do not necessarily differentiate between an organization and its partners (Edmond and Fisher 2005).

Presence of complementary inputs. Organizations should look to partner with those that have complementary skills and resources, such as staff skills, equipment, materials and access to communities and donors. This increases the ability of the alliances to become greater than the sum of their parts. This was one of the main reasons that organizations in this study chose to become part of an alliance. Most organizations noted that they looked for complementary technical skills, which are particularly important in PHE projects.

Fundraising ability. Organizations should think about the fundraising opportunities when they join or create a PHE alliance. In this case, the goal is not necessarily complementary inputs, but rather sustainability for the project or alliance. Therefore, for small NGOs, an appropriate partner NGO would be one that has access to the funding community. Larger NGOs may be able to contribute to sustainability by building the fundraising capacity of a local NGO – by joint fundraising, technical support and creating networking opportunities.

Staff characteristics. Characteristics of the staff also affected the alliance. One individual suggested that organizations need to pay attention to the underlying power dynamics of staff when they create alliances – characteristics such as the gender, race and age of staff can affect how the staff members work together. In another case the functioning of the project, and therefore the alliance, was attributed to the dedication and hard work of a single person. Given that family planning, reproductive health and even conservation are issues toward which individuals have strong ideological preferences and opinions, it is crucial that positive inter-organizational personal relationships be formed easily and quickly.

Size and scale. The size of the partner organizations can have various effects on the alliance. Several individuals commented on the difficulties of partnering with large organizations. One individual thought that the partner, a much larger organization, had such a broad agenda that it was difficult for the two organizations to create a common agenda. The priorities of the two organizations were too different. Another individual mentioned that the partner was trying to cover such a large area that it had too few resources available for the project area. The size of the organization also made decision making more cumbersome, as decisions had to go through a longer chain of command and made meetings between the two organizations more difficult to coordinate.

The advantage of partnering with a larger organization is that it generally has greater access to resources, including financial sources. In Madagascar, Kleinau et al. (2005) found that the resources available to an organization and the capacity of the organization affected its performance. In that study, the projects implemented by the large international NGO were more successful because of these factors. But, the authors also concluded that local NGOs offered “a good return on investment” as they were the most cost effective way to reach target populations in ecologically sensitive areas (Kleinau 2005:11). Similarly, Castro et al. (2004) found in IPOPCORM projects that a local NGO office can serve as a gathering place for community participation in project activities.

Location of organizations. The location of the organizations in the alliance also affected their performance. One individual noted that the great distance between the field office and the support office in the United States meant that individuals in the two offices had very different ideas about what was happening in the field, and this which caused strains in communication between the offices. This distance also meant that maintaining flexibility, or the ability to respond to changes in project conditions, was more difficult.

Connections to the government. Working with the government can bring distinct advantages and disadvantages, particularly with respect to funding, credibility and flexibility, which may vary by project site. In this sample, government agencies are involved in several projects in the form of the Ministry of Health, although the degree to which it is involved varies greatly. In some cases, it is involved in name only. In others, such as in Tanzania, where the Ministry of Health is obligated by law to supervise the health activities, it has been very involved. In two alliances that involved the government, individuals noted that the NGO partner organizations were able to fill in service gaps for the government. In one case, it was because the government did not have the supplies and equipment that the staff needed to be able to work, and in the other case, the NGO was able to work in a remote area that the government had not reached. Working with the government can bring certain advantages, such as increased funding, but can also result in different challenges. One

organization found that it needed to set aside time for capacity building with its government partner, particularly on monitoring and evaluation. In another area, working with the government may have caused problems between the NGO staff and local community as there were conflicts between the government and local communities.

4.3.2 Structuring a PHE Alliance

It is important for an organization to consider the structure of an alliance when considering joining or creating one. We were able to determine four different types of alliance models present in this sample, categorized by the number of organizations, the decision-making structure and division of labor in the alliance. We included only those organizations that are actively involved in the PHE project. In many cases, however, there are additional organizations peripherally involved in technical support, fundraising and administrative assistance. Examples of PHE alliances represented in the sample are provided under each model description.

There is no one model that works in all situations. We found advantages and disadvantages for each type of model. When forming an alliance, therefore, organizations need to determine what costs and benefits are important to them.

1. Simple involvement

In this type of alliance, one organization both implements and is in charge of the decision making. It partners or coordinates with other organizations that provide technical, financial and in-kind support as needed. Some alliances with government agencies that are only minimally involved fall under this category. (Two projects in our sample fall under this category.)

Example: In one alliance, a conservation NGO that is also working on health issues has overlapping goals with a local health NGO. The two organizations are aware of each other's work, share information and coordinate when possible, while working on their own projects. They have different areas of expertise and are therefore able to have a greater impact through this coordination.

Advantages

- Clear roles and division of labor in alliance
- Decisions can be made quickly
- Low coordination costs
- Can still build on social capital of partners

Disadvantages

- Less potential for capacity building and transfer of technical knowledge among partners
- Limited access to financial resources or expertise
- Less potential to expand geographical range of project
- Doesn't necessarily create new synergy or new approach to problem solving

2. One decision maker, one implementer

In this type of alliance, one organization makes the major decisions for the project while the partner organization implements the project. This is a common arrangement, particularly with organizations that operate at different levels – for example, when one partner is an international NGO, and the other is a national NGO (or when one is a national NGO and the other a local NGO). This is also common in contractual arrangements and projects that are based on a template. (Four projects in our sample fall under this category.)

Example: In one alliance, the lead organization, which is health focused, created the vision and work plan for the project and has trained a local conservation partner to implement both the health and conservation components of the project. The conservation partner can make small changes to the project, as needed due to changes in the field, but any major decisions need to be coordinated with the health organization.

Advantages

- Clear roles and division of labor in alliance
- Access to more financial resources and expertise
- Potential for larger geographical range
- Can create new synergy or approach to problem solving
- Can build on existing social capital
- Can combine complementary skills
- Potential for capacity building and transfer of technical knowledge among partners
- Potential for many contractual arrangements in this model

Disadvantages

The decision-making organization doesn't necessarily understand field conditions

- Decision making may be time consuming, which could result in loss of flexibility and innovation
- Potential power differentials among organizations could cause problems
- It may be more difficult to create new synergy or a new approach to a problem
- Doesn't necessarily reduce overlapping in field or fill in service gaps

3. Many decision makers, one implementer

In this type of alliance, a group of organizations makes the decisions for the project, for example in the form of a steering committee, while one organization (which may or may not be included in the decision-making process) implements the project. (One project in our sample falls under this category.)

Example: In one alliance, two large international development NGOs work with a local conservation NGO to share in the decision making and technical planning for the project, while the local NGO is the primary implementing organization. In this case, the larger NGOs assist in field work when necessary.

Advantages

- Relatively clear roles and division of labor, at least in terms of implementation
- Potential for larger geographical range
- Access to more financial resources and expertise
- Can create new synergy or new approach to problem solving
- Can build on existing social capital
- Can combine complementary skills
- Potential for capacity building and transfer of technical knowledge among partners
- Potential for many contractual arrangements in this model

Disadvantages

- Decision making may be time consuming, which could result in loss of flexibility and innovation
- The decision-making organization doesn't necessarily understand field conditions
- Power differential among organizations could cause problems
- May be resource intensive (and difficult) in terms of coordination

4. Two (or more) decision makers and two (or more) implementers

In this type of alliance, two or more organizations make the decisions for the project while two or more implement the project. The decision-making and implementing organizations may or may not be the same. The division of labor may split along sectors – with each organization working on the part of the project that is its area of expertise. This type of alliance can also include consortia. (Six projects in our sample fall under this category.)

Example: In one alliance, a local environmental NGO works with the local governmental health unit to implement the project. They both make decisions for the project, but focus on their own respective areas of expertise – therefore the environmental organization works on the conservation activities in the project and the health unit works on the family planning/reproductive health activities in the project.

Advantages

- Each organization capitalizes on its expertise
- Potential for larger geographical range
- Access to more financial resources and expertise
- Less likely to have problems with power dynamics
- Less potential for difficulties in creating clear roles and division of labor

Disadvantages

- Less potential for capacity building and transfer of technical knowledge among partners
- May be resource intensive (and difficult) in terms of coordination
- Project may not be very integrated in the field – communities may not associate the activities, which may minimize intended benefits

- Decision making could be time consuming, which could result in loss of flexibility and innovation
- May be more difficult to create new synergy or new approach to problem

There are different ways to combine skill sets to implement PHE projects. Having several organizations involved in the implementation in the project, rather than just one, may require greater coordination, but may not greatly affect the project outcome, according to a recent study conducted by Kleinau et al. (2005). They examined population-environment projects that were implemented by three different types of teams: (1) multidisciplinary teams within one organization; (2) different health and environment teams within the same organization; and (3) field agents from different sector-specific organizations—health, agriculture, environment. The authors found that the difference in the field team structure did not affect performance on the project (Kleinau et al. 2005).

4.3.3 Creating a PHE Alliance

After examining the factors above and deciding to join or create an alliance, organizations need to be aware of factors that may affect how the alliance itself functions. The following recommendations are based on discussions with project staff on what elements made their alliance work.

Vision. *Work with alliance partners to create a common vision for the project.* Most organizations stated that they developed the vision for the project in conjunction with their partner organizations. But in a few alliances, particularly contractual arrangements, the vision for the project was developed by one organization while the partner organization was expected to adopt the vision, rather than partake in its creation. In one case, this compromised the flexibility of the project when the organization felt obligated to adhere to a vision that did not match field conditions. A shared vision, among other things, was thought to make communication easier. In one alliance, the conservation organization invited its health-oriented partner organization to its planning meeting in order to help the partner understand and share the conservation organization’s vision.

Budget Issues. *Budget for start-up alliance meetings for all members.* Although often overlooked, these meetings are important to ensure that staff members from each organization have the opportunity to meet and develop relationships. In addition, money needs to be budgeted for staff training. The main limitation noted in working with small organizations is that they may not have the capacity needed to fulfill the projects and deliver results in the necessary time frame (Conservation International 2005b). Most small NGOs are staffed with individuals who have to fulfill a variety of roles, programmatic and administrative, that they may not have the training to complete.

Location of Key Staff. *Consider whether you or your partner will have adequate resources to place staff on the project site.* While having staff on site can make communication difficult, it can be advantageous in many ways. Staff members that are based on site tend to have a much greater understanding of field conditions –social, biological, economic and political – that can affect the impact of the project. Having staff on site also demonstrates a certain level of commitment and therefore credibility that is otherwise difficult to cultivate (Castro et al. 2004). In this sample, few organizations had staff based on site. This was mentioned by one

organization as the reason that one of its projects faced difficulties in providing the health services that it offered (Edmond and Fisher 2005). One of the few projects that did have people based on site mentioned this as one of their strengths: Both organizations in the alliance had people based on site, who were therefore very familiar with the area. In remote areas, having field staff on site means close contact with the project but can mean difficult communications with project staff not on site. In two projects that did have staff based on site, the distance between the support office and the field office made communication and coordination difficult.

4.3.4 Maintaining a PHE Alliance

After the alliance has been created, individuals had additional recommendations on how to maintain it:

Staff Relationships. *Pay attention to the personal dynamics among staff members and facilitate the development of constructive personal relationships.* The individual staff members played an important role in the functioning of the alliance. Several individuals indicated that regular contact among staff from the different partner organizations was necessary to facilitate good organizational relationships. In one alliance, the organizations set up meetings on regular five-week intervals and organized site field trips so as to ensure sufficient communication. In another case, the individuals from the partner organizations already knew each other, and the offices were located near each other, which meant that the staff often met on an informal basis and could therefore deal with small issues as they developed. The power of personal relationships was demonstrated in one project in the Philippines where staff members were able to forge a good relationship with the mayor, partly by involving his wife in project activities. This relationship proved to be important in how the organization was able to work in the community. Personal relationships can be so important, in fact, that Conservation International advises that organizations forgo partnerships where the staff members do not have good relationships, even if all other factors indicate that an organization may be a good partner (Edmond and Fisher 2005).

Communication. *Create a structure for regular, frequent communication among staff members.* A potential problem in alliances that involve organizations from different sectors is that they tend to have a different vocabulary, which can cause difficulties in communication. Several individuals in this study noted that there were differences in the vocabulary of the organizations but that most people were sensitive to this; and therefore it did not cause problems. Most individuals thought that their organization did a fairly good job of creating a common language and took the time to ensure that everyone understood the jargon used in each field. This allowed them to be fairly effective at communicating with each other. One organization mentioned the use of 'round tables' to allow staff from the organizations to have detailed discussions about project decisions. Communication among organizations can also be difficult due to location of staff members and scheduling conflicts. For this reason, a regular meeting schedule should be developed at the beginning of the project and maintained throughout the life of the project.

Capacity Building and Knowledge Transfer. *Create opportunities for staff members to learn about all aspects of PHE projects.* Several individuals noted that staff lacked the necessary

knowledge about the issues in different sectors of the project. In other words, in some alliances, the staff members in the environment field often knew little about health issues, and the staff in the health field knew little about environmental issues. One organization attempted to address this deficiency by inviting the environment staff to attend health workshops to give them an opportunity to learn more about the health issues in the project. Other alliances relied on the expertise of support staff based in Washington, D.C., as a resource for filling in this information gap. One individual suggested that staff from each organization spend time with their partners (or staff from other sectors) in the field to get a better understanding of the issues. One individual, however, felt that it was difficult to get staff from other sectors interested in their work, particularly if the project itself was more focused on one topic (either health or environment).

Staff Training. *Make training appropriate for the local resources.* Staff members need the skills to be able to function effectively using the resources available to them. One project found that staff training was based on technology that was not locally available, such as fax machines, and was therefore of limited value. Staff members need capacity building that is appropriate for the resources they use, even if it is not state-of-the-art standards.

Support from Inside and Out. *Work to build support for the PHE approach, and the individual project, from inside the organizations to outside in the field.* The alliance itself must provide sufficient support for field offices, particularly on technical issues and filling in knowledge gaps on PHE issues. Several individuals noted that they needed additional support from home offices to fill in gaps that can result from working in different sectors. In addition, it is important that the alliance create support from the outside – particularly local institutions such as the government and influential religious organizations. These organizations can greatly influence a project’s impact in a community. For example, several organizations working in the Philippines found the church to be an important institution with which to create a relationship and develop support.

Funding Issues. *Look for multiple sources of funding that can provide flexibility for project functioning and sustainability for project continuity.* Most projects that deal with population, health or conservation face several similar challenges when dealing with funding. The funding cycles are fairly short, while the projects need to work on a much longer time scale. And the intended effects of the projects function on an even longer time scale. In addition, most donors want their funds to go to the actual projects, leaving many NGOs with little money for overhead expenses. For local NGOs, this can mean that they are not able to continue functioning without constant projects and can face the prospect of having to fire and rehire staff members each time their grants end. It also means that NGOs may accept grants for specific projects that do not necessarily fall under their mandate, simply to keep their organizations going. In addition, PHE projects can be viewed as somewhat political; therefore, their funding may be more subject to changes within the donor community. And as the thematic scope of these projects is larger, they tend to need more support from additional sectors –such as economic, political, etc. They may, therefore, need more flexibility in how funds are used.

Monitoring and Evaluation. *Set aside resources (time and money) to develop the capacity to carry out sufficient monitoring and evaluation for the project.* Most organizations (12 out of 16) had an M/E (monitoring and evaluation) system in place. In general, the organizations in each alliance

collaborated to develop the M/E framework and gather and analyze the information via workshops, reports and meetings. Many individuals thought that the partners were effectively sharing information in the alliance (an average rating of 4 out of 5). A workshop was considered by many to be the most efficient way of sharing information. The greatest obstacle mentioned was the lack of staff capacity that was necessary to carry out the monitoring and evaluation, although other challenges mentioned were lack of funds, short time frames, differing institutional agendas and the time-consuming nature of the task (to get together, plan and carry out the M/E). Most individuals noted that they aimed to incorporate learning into their project through presentations, field visits, training and creating work plans. In a few projects, individuals noted that they were not able to, or did not focus on, incorporating learning into their project.

4.3.5 Common Challenges and Pitfalls of PHE Alliances

We asked individuals about the challenges they faced in their projects and how they were able to manage or overcome them. Below we list the most common challenges and pitfalls, as well as suggestions based on how different organizations approached them.

Challenges in Alliance Coordination

Unclearly defined roles

Clarify the roles and responsibilities of each organization when creating the alliance. Revisit these roles on a regular basis throughout the life of the alliance as they may need to be modified as the project evolves.

Maintaining ongoing contact between advisers and managers of both organizations

Establish regular, frequent meetings with all organizations in the alliance and field trips to project sites to observe issues in the field first hand.

Minimum opportunities to discuss possible adaptations during project

Communicate on a regular, frequent basis and find mechanisms to enable easy information sharing among partners. If possible, conduct joint monitoring on the project.

Communication difficult among staff members in different offices

Ensure adequate technology in all offices. For example, in one case this was overcome by installing satellite equipment at the field camp. In other cases, this was resolved by establishing regular field site visits or staff retreats.

Difficulty scheduling meetings because of scale at which each partner works

Be flexible about the timing and attendance of meetings. Also be open to the need to reschedule meetings.

Challenges in Implementation

Difficulty in the joint coordination of the M/E system and project implementation

Work together to develop the M/E plan to ensure that all organizations involved are prepared to jointly implement it.

Lack of integration between the environment and health sectors of the project in the field

Be aware of the link and the perception of this link by the other organizations in the alliance, as well as in the communities where the project is implemented. Also develop activities that include the promotion of the environment and health message at the field level.

Hesitation of stakeholders

Increase transparency as much as possible. In one case, the organizations sat down with all the stakeholders and created an M/E evaluation plan so that everyone could track the progress of the project.

Challenges in Capacity

Lack of health knowledge by environment staff and vice versa

Increase staff access to population-environment themed workshops and conferences. Be sure to include each type of staff in trainings, for example, by inviting the health staff to environment workshops and environment staff to reproductive health workshops.

Lack of experience and new approach for all partners

Budget time and resources for capacity-building for all partners. In many cases, the PHE approach is new for at least one member of the alliance. Therefore, it is important to budget extra resources and time to ensure sufficient project development and capacity building.

Challenges in Funding

Different funding cycles for each partner

Increase transparency about funding so that each organization understands the funding cycles, and therefore financial limitations, of their partner organizations.

Inadequate funding

Undertake joint fundraising and budget for capacity building to increase the ability of smaller organizations to raise funds. Also, work closely with the board and outside individuals committed to the project. Networking through individuals can lead to funding opportunities.

Getting funding to the field

Institute quarterly reports from staff to ensure that the organization fulfills reporting requirements needed to access financial support quickly.

Staff Characteristics

Experienced and well-trained staff members do not stay in the area for long

Offer work incentives as much as possible. Find out what kind of benefits are most appreciated and fundraise to make those possible.

Lack of trust

Increase communication among partners to build relationships among individuals. Also try to focus on cooperation to overcome potential fears of competition (fundraising, publicity, etc.).

Working with Government

Lack of capacity in local government

Budget appropriate resources from the beginning of the project to build capacity of government agencies where needed – for example in monitoring and evaluation.

Lack of support of local government

Find compromises on when to work on conservation and when to work on family planning. Staff members of one project found that they gained support by involving the local officials and their family members in as many project activities and tours as possible.

4.3.6 External Factors

External factors can cause additional challenges. Eleven out of 13 individuals noted that external factors affected the project and the alliance, although most thought that their organizations managed the factors satisfactorily. The following external factors were cited as the most important:

- Interference by the church
- Remoteness of the project area
- Disruption from local politics
- Unstable social conditions
- Fragmented approach of organizations working in the area
- General poverty in the area
- Environmental degradation in surrounding area
- Challenging geographic characteristics
- Poor weather conditions that impede transportation to site
- Lack of access to infrastructure and services
- Lack of access to economic opportunities
- Cultural beliefs that do not support reproductive health component
- Weak legal framework (affecting forestry component)
- Poor security due to the proximity to unstable border

4.3.7 Defining Success for the PHE Alliance and the Project

Most alliances were viewed as an important means to achieve a successful project. Yet only one individual said that the organization had created a framework for evaluating the effectiveness of the alliance itself. But most individuals had clear ideas of what they determined would constitute a successful alliance:

- Achieving collaborative implementation (4 individuals)
- Creating a sustainable alliance (3 individuals)
- Developing common goals (2 individuals)
- Developing joint work plans (2 individuals)

- Maintaining a relationship free from conflict among partner organizations (2 individuals)
- Integrating health and environment components (2 individuals)
- Creating a certain level of synergy among organizations
- Having effective debates and ‘roundtable’ discussions among staff
- Achieving joint decision-making in alliance
- Creating a joint M/E system
- Using individuals for M/E that were trained by the project
- Maximizing project resources
- Creating transparency and accountability in the alliance
- Bringing in additional money for the project
- Greater understanding among partners
- Continuing of services at limited costs
- Changing lives and achieving a common goal
- Meeting on a regular basis
- Sharing information and resources

When asked about the success achieved in their project, individuals mentioned specific achievements as well as general milestones, many of which were similar to what would constitute a successful alliance:

- Increased access to reproductive health and basic services (4 individuals)
- Specific project goal achievements (4 individuals)
- Environmental achievements (2 individuals)
- Joint fundraising by alliance organizations (2 individuals)
- Increased awareness of population-environment linkages at community level (2 individuals)
- Maximization of project resources (2 individuals)
- Knowledge sharing among organizations
- Joint M/E by organizations in the alliance
- Training of individuals in M/E
- Creation of new alliances and linkages for sustainability of organization
- Positive public relations
- Creation of sustainable project
- Behavior change in community and adoption of new technology
- Motivation from community to collaborate on project
- Commitment from both partners to sustain through good times and bad
- Creation of a common vision
- Involvement of government
- Partner organization continues integrated work

5. A Review to Guide Future Plans

The goal of this research was to glean lessons learned from past and ongoing population-environment projects in order to understand how to create more effective alliances in the future. If we combine what we know from the literature with the results from our study, we can make several recommendations for what to keep in mind to create a successful PHE alliance. Here, we compile and review these recommendations again:

When Creating an Alliance, Remember to...

- Work with organizations that have complementary inputs, such as technical skills.
- Work with credible organizations.
- Budget resources for start-up alliance meetings for all members.
- Be aware of how the size and scale of your partner organizations will affect the project.
- Clarify the roles and responsibilities of each organization when creating the alliance.
- Consider whether you or your partner will have adequate resources to place staff on site.
- Work with alliance partners to create a common vision for the project.
- Carefully consider the costs and benefits of working with the government.
- Create mechanisms to keep organizations on track in the project and in the alliance – and procedures to follow when they are not.
- Think about alliance and project sustainability from the beginning.

In Order to Maintain the Alliance, Remember to...

- Develop mechanisms to maintain transparency, about the project *and* its funding, among partner organizations and stakeholders.
- Fundraise jointly when possible and increase the capacity of smaller organizations to raise their own funds.
- Look for multiple sources of funding that can provide flexibility for project functioning and sustainability for project continuity.
- Budget time and resources for capacity building for all partners.
- Make training realistic in regards to local resources.
- Pay attention to the personal dynamics among staff members and facilitate the development of constructive personal relationships.
- Offer work incentives to staff as much as possible. Find out what kind of benefits are most appreciated and fundraise to make those possible.
- Revisit the roles and responsibilities of the organizations in the alliance to make sure the division of labor remains effective.
- Work to build support for the PHE approach, and the individual project, from inside the organizations to outside in the field.
- Create opportunities for staff members to learn about all aspects of PHE projects.
- Set aside resources (time and money) to develop the capacity to carry out sufficient monitoring and evaluation for the project. And work together to develop the M&E plan to ensure that all organizations involved are prepared to jointly implement it.

- Establish regular, frequent, meetings with all organizations in the alliance and field trips to the project sites to observe issues in the field first hand.
- Be flexible about the timing and attendance of meetings. Also be open to the need to reschedule meetings.
- Ensure adequate technology for communication among all offices.
- Make local government agencies a champion for the cause and build the capacity of community members to be their own spokespeople.
- Find compromises on when to work on conservation and when to work on family planning.
- Maintain a long-term view of the project. Keep sustainability in mind.

6. Recommended Reading

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